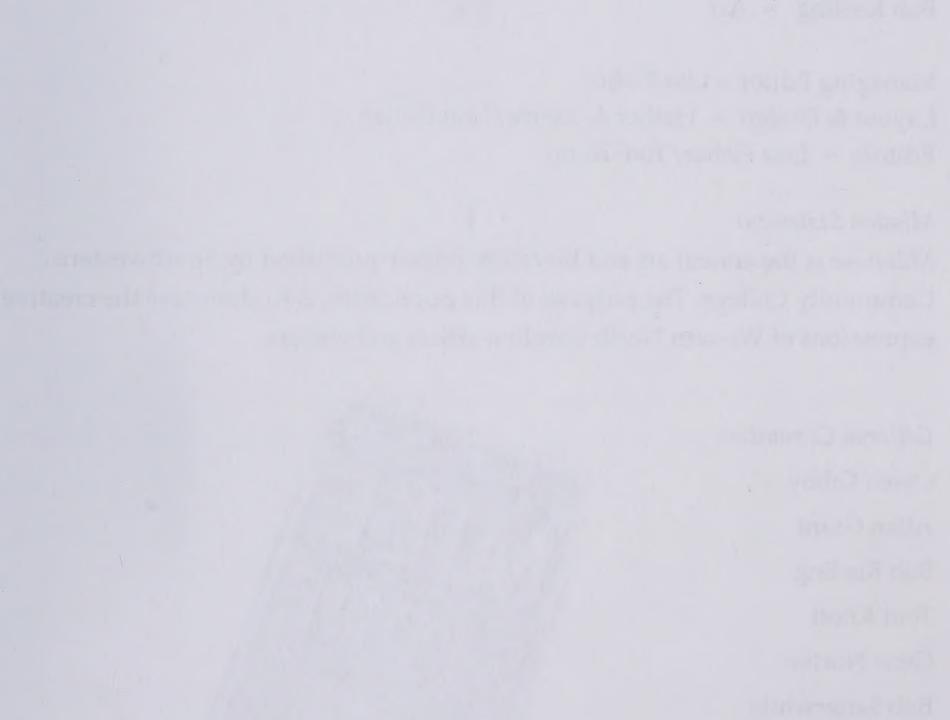




Milestone

Volume 7 2007

Art & Literature Review



Creative Expressions of Western North Carolina Artists & Writers
Southwestern Community College

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Mission Statement

Milestone is the annual art and literature review published by Southwestern Community College. The purpose of this publication is to showcase the creative expressions of Western North Carolina artists and writers.

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Dedicated to all in the area who practice and support the arts

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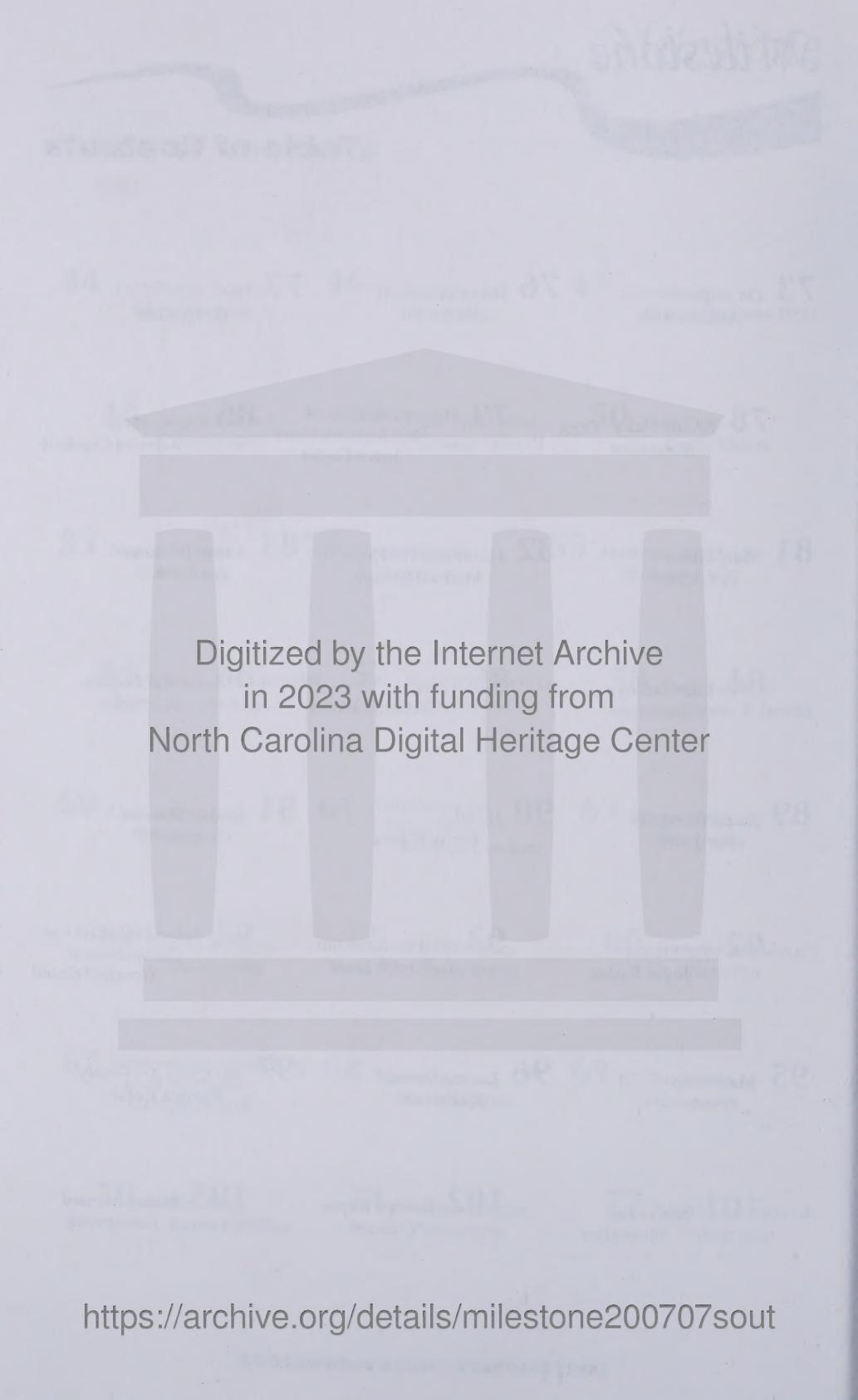
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CARA MACDONALD
FIRST PLACE ~ ART

There Will Be Time Again

JOYCE FOSTER

FIRST PLACE ~ POETRY

Alone, trying to tether my thoughts
to gather them like fish in a net,
I come unmoored and drift
on waves of a song catching
the edges of a crest, a Blues singer
telling our story with her words.

How could she know?

Your letters, secreted
in the bottom drawer, bundles
tied with string, hold us together.
The words like old beads strung
and restrung, sung by bards and poets
tell the stories of lovers since time
before time and now for us.

There in the photograph
in a grain of eternity
we are captured on a beach,
the sea leaving its foam
on the sand like oysters
giving up their pearls, our
happiness so aglow it shamed
the sun into setting.

I want to touch you, to feel
your wounds, press my lips
to your scars, cradle your
battered body and rock you
to and fro and tell you
there will be time again.

The Nicest Thing

EMILY ELDERS

FIRST PLACE ~ SHORT STORY

Sometimes the laughter in mothering is the recognition of the ironies and absurdities.

Sometimes, though, it's just pure, unthinking delight.

—Barbara Schapiro

The nicest thing about becoming a parent is the almost superhuman ability to adapt that comes with it. It's as if my body knows somehow what is necessary, what new traits I must acquire, without the help of my mind. My mind, of course, is still caught up in the newness of it all, the adjustment to a life bounded by responsibility where before I flew and ran from it with all the haste I could muster. On a daily basis I think and do things that would have been beyond the imagination of my pre-parenthood self.

I've discovered a hidden talent for performing miraculous feats like two-minute showers; one-handed, ten-second car-seat buckles; the ability to carry seven bags on one shoulder for an extended period of time; and how to do everything I used to do before with only one side of my body, as though I had been paralyzed from the shoulder down in some freak accident. I now own The One-Handed Cookbook, which literally tells you never to stir one thing while preheating another. I never forget to set the coffeepot to brew automatically, so that I can grab some in between those first crucial morning rituals of changing a baby, bathing a baby, feeding a baby, and changing a baby again. The smell of poop no longer bothers me; I discovered for myself the nifty trick of smothering everything, including the offending diaper, with baby powder, to mask the smell. I know how to wrestle four thrashing limbs and a disobedient head into a shirt, pants, socks and—most difficult of all—shoes with shoelaces. I've become able to survive on four hours of sleep—counting the interruptions each time she wakes up—and to do homework at midnight, after a long waitressing

shift in which I have bowed just a little bit extra for tips so that I might buy the good brand of diapers on the way home. I have learned that the luxuries of makeup, matching socks, and wearing jewelry belong to those lucky few who are still single and free. And the lesson that took me longest to learn but is the most rewarding: always, always, always turn on "Baby Einstein" before making that first morning trip to the bathroom.

My partner and I have noticed some new abilities as a team, too, and some new aspects of our relationship we'd never noticed before. Now, for example, we know how to argue quietly, with cutting words and half-whispered shouts that can't be heard by a sleeping baby; we've discovered, basically, that we are capable of arguing, which we weren't before. Somehow, having the responsibility and inevitability of all a child means has made it easier to find fault, made it more important somehow that we express our anger. The reconciliations, also, are different: we make love on the couch, or the floor, because our bed creaks and it's harder to be quiet during make-up love. We've also discovered new ways to go out, to treat ourselves: actually cooking a full dinner in our own house is a big night for us. It's especially exciting when we get to rent a movie and watch it all the way through without stopping. We learned early on that the quickest way to start a fight was to leave the bottles undone before leaving the other one with the baby; we've learned how to make do with a fraction of the time we used to spend together in favor of working long hours for crappy pay so that when we do hang out, it can at least be in a house that doesn't leak, is actually semi-insulated, and has enough room for both our desks.

There are a million adaptations we've been making every single day for a year. Some of these adjustments are minor, the things you can tell other people who are expecting—budgeting for savings (savings? what's that? we're in our twenties, for crying out loud!), scheduling one night a week where we each get to go out drinking and leave the other one at home, laundry and trash versus dishes and diapers. It is the unseen sacrifices, though, that will tear you up at the end of the day. It's the way all your dreams get delayed for another twenty years; it's the way your

hands tremble when you think about how you long to be free, and how you could never imagine things any other way. It's how you cherish time alone in the car, sunroof open and music blaring, so much so that you drive an extra ten miles, stealing time and wasting expensive gas, just to feel that sweet shiny solitude a little longer. What I can never say to my beautiful pregnant friends, all glowing and grown-up and anticipating greatness, is that the paradox of your life—the fulfillment of your own family and the desire to be free of it, to have just a few more years to throw down—is going to absorb you about six months in, and for a few months every time you look at your child you'll only be able to cry. You'll cry because she's beautiful and you'll cry because you know you were beautiful too, once, before the ear infections and the messes in restaurants and the power company threatening to cut off your electricity.

I can't tell them this. They are too in thrall with the magic of it all. But I can tell them the best of what I know so far, and this is it: that after the day is done, we take our small naps in the night, curled up together in the bed with only our backs touching, wrapped for that one intangible moment in the soft dimness of our room, listening to her breathe and rustle in her sleep. Every time I do this I realize what it has all been for, and I go to sleep with the knowledge that what I have done today is good, and what I do tomorrow will be good, no matter what it is I have actually accomplished in the outside world.

Last night was especially nice: we had just settled in, and were both feeling that calm contentment we have come to feel, when the still silence was broken by the loudest fart I've ever heard, from adult or child. She groaned a little afterward, and went back to sleep immediately, but we began laughing silently at the same time, feeling the bed shake with our mirth, and I thought to myself: this, now, this is what it's all about. I can adapt to anything, if only I continue to hear her farting in her sleep: and who have I become now, that I would be satisfied with flatulence as my daily reward? She cannot thank me, or hug me, or kiss me goodbye yet; but I shall be content for now with her midnight farts and his quiet shared appreciation of the beauty of her, sleeping.



**JUAN RESTREPO
SECOND PLACE ~ ART**

Elementary
KAREN GILFILLAN
SECOND PLACE ~ POETRY

The oil-soaked wooden stairs
were center slung with age
from long-trod trudges
of short legs.

We climbed them each day
during the season of learning.
Then raced down them
when the school bell rang.

Fire escapes wrought with iron
defaced the sturdy
brick structure
on West Merrin Street.

They were never used for escape,
only for after-school play time.

Do bricks burn?

Or simply crumble from old age?
As we do.

Elementary.

Painter's Hands

SOPHIE ALLEN

SECOND PLACE ~ SHORT STORY

To my friends and family who may know the special person who inspired my passion for music

My piano teacher Carolyn Joiner is not only a pianist; she is an artist as well. When her aged hands press the keys, she creates music I can see. She paints a picture in her music that when I hear her play, I behold a beautiful masterpiece that puts Da Vinci, Monet, and other famous artists to shame. She has not only opened my ears to the world of music, she has opened my eyes as well.

When she was first brought into my life, I was seven years old and going to the Open Door, a soup kitchen where feel-good Christians provided food for the less fortunate, or others that were too lazy to earn their own bread. It was located on a part of town called Frog Level. The name says it all; we were the lowest of the low on the food chain of humankind. Day after day, we would sit at old cast-off tables in a dim, musty room and stare into the goopy substances the place offered as food. On that cold, rainy day, our heads turned at the sound of the front door creaking open. Standing in the doorway was a little old lady who was surveying our worn tables and faces that were turned her way.

She was buried in her ankle-length, plaid skirt and buttoned-to-the-chin blouse. Her thin hair was cut just below the ear and set "just so" with a fine hair spray that left the scent of fermented roses behind her as she walked by. Propped across the bridge of her nose were horned-rimmed spectacles that would have slipped off if it weren't for the gold chain that held them on. Her nose looked like the beak of an eagle. It was turned up in the air taking in the smell of moldy floorboards, unwashed bodies, and God knows what smell that came from the kitchen.

I could not take my eyes from her; I was like a bug drawn to a light in the evening time. The focused glint in her eye and the cemented frown on her face made me want to cower and hide under the table.

She walked with a stiff back and determined pace toward the old broken-down piano in the corner. It looked like it had been through Hell. Its once-white keys were stained like the teeth of a person that chewed tobacco, and its black paint was peeling off, giving it the appearance of the bark on a birch tree. The bench screeched as she sat on it, and we all waited for her next move. With a straight back and placed hands, she began to play a song that made the world fade away.

I watched her veined, wrinkled hands glide across the keys. As I listened to her music, I was transported to a place with vivid blue skies, cotton-candy clouds, and glorious sunrises that kissed my skin. I danced on a carpet of soft green grass, walked on crystal waters, and feasted on music so sweet I could taste it.

As her fingers stopped, her music died, and my heart broke as I was brought back to a sad reality.

She rose from her throne like a queen and walked back to the door she had come from. She gripped the doorknob and turned toward me, capturing my hazel pools with her cold, blue eyes that twinkled with understanding. I wanted to fall to my knees and worship her, so noble was her bearing. After reading the depths of my soul, she released my eyes, and I took a deep breath. The spell was lifted.

Through the open door she went, back to the world so far above our station in life. I longed to run after her and beg her to take me with her to the land where Heaven's music could be heard, but I was left only with the sound of the door slamming behind her, leaving a black and white world, without color or light.

It was years later that she offered to instruct me in the ways of piano. I would spend hours playing scales for her over and over again.

She would sit next to me on the piano bench, making me choke with the smell of her overbearing perfume, and she would constantly correct my poor posture until I looked like a soldier called to attention.

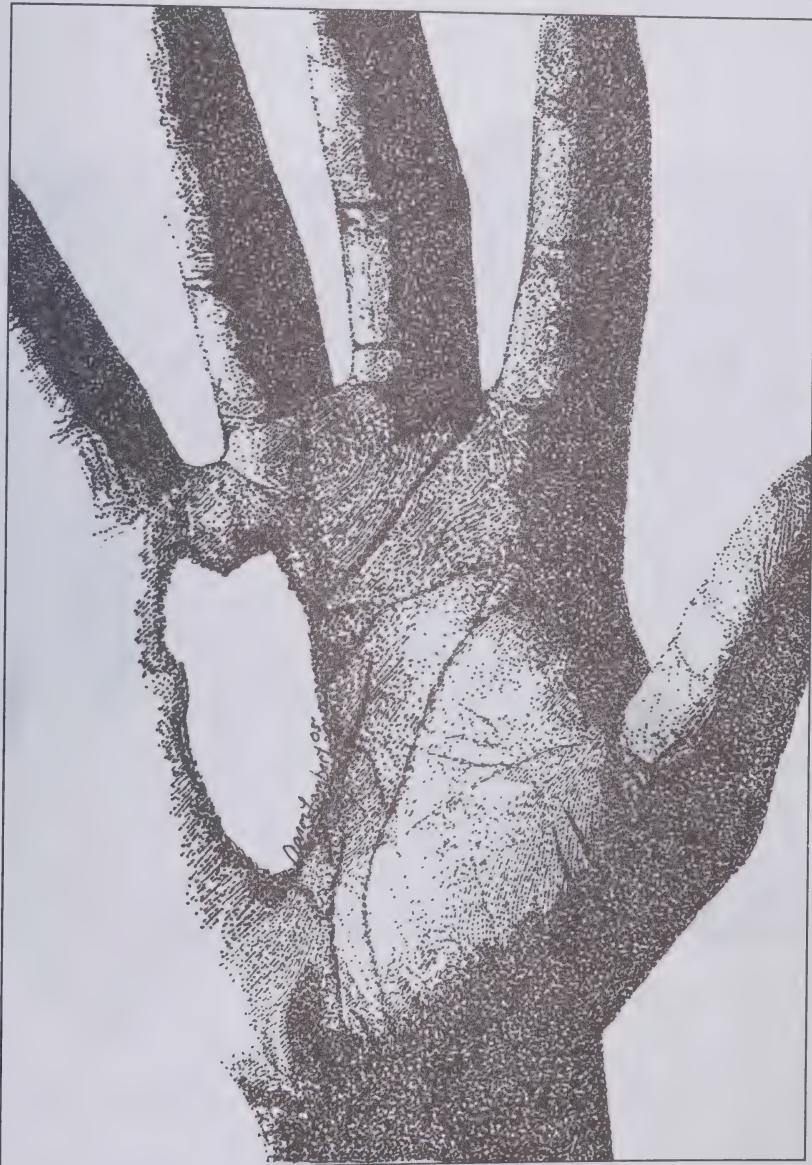
"And one and two and three," we would count until it was pounded into my skull: Chopin, Beethoven, Bach, and many other composers she introduced me to. When I played a wrong note, she would gently correct me, saying from her brightly lipsticked mouth: "It's okay, dear, try again." I would only stare at the smudge of lipstick that she always got on her teeth and try not to laugh.

With every lesson, I fell more in love with music as I was transported to another world far from the dark life I lived. I came to look past her as just my piano teacher to love Carolyn as a grandmother and closest friend. We used to walk around the lake near her house. She would tell me of her past as the daughter of a Methodist minister and playing the organ and piano every Sunday since she was ten.

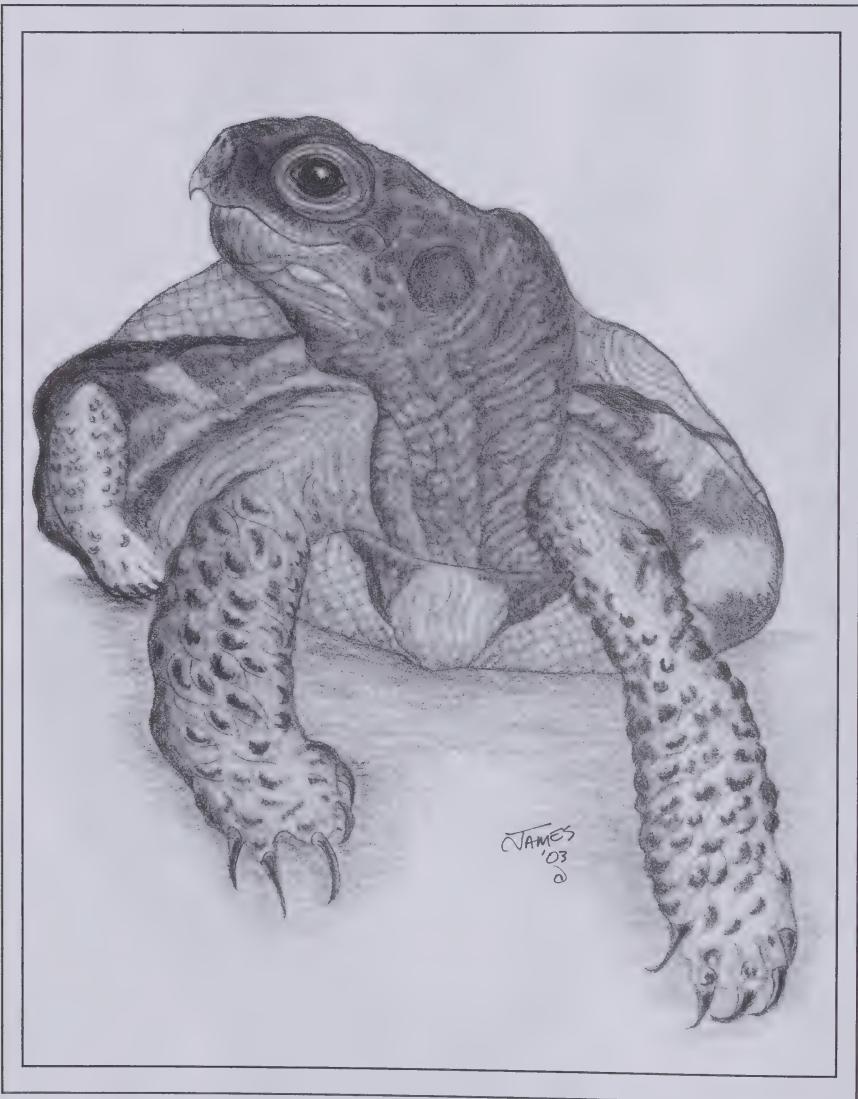
Majoring in music instruction at Asbury College in Kentucky, she was a traditional kind of woman. For example, she would tell the story countless times of not being allowed to wear pants in her day, all the while looking me up and down with apparent disapproval on her face.

I still visit her at her house near the lake and play piano for her. She sits next to me on the cherry wood piano bench and listens as I paint a picture for her. She is nothing but skin and bones now, and her back is bent from the heavy load of years, her face is lined with many wrinkles, but her eyes—her cold, blue eyes—still are filled with a sparkled glint that speaks of royalty.

Carolyn Joiner opened my ears and eyes to a beautiful world. She created a world that she painted by the slight pressure of her fingers on the keys, a world that is filled with beauty and peace, the world of music.



AARON LAMBERT



JENNY JAMES



NICOLE "ICKY" PEGG

Say Nothing

GEORGE FRIZZELL

Some days I like to say nothing
it helps avoid these games
I like to walk in the silence
not to worry about every word
and what I said wrong
The phone can ring
I got an answering machine
not even my voice



PAIGE HARPE



SHELBY BLANTON

The Perfect Game

MICHAEL REVERE

Power and Grace
walk hand in hand
side by side
floating on air
and glowing with love.

The seeds of their lifelong commitment
to each other
were planted at a bowling alley
on their first date.

When Power fired
a heavyweight bowling ball
down the hardwood lane
ten pins exploded as one
and could plainly be heard
in the parking lot
leaving Grace in awe.

When Grace released
a featherweight bowling ball
down the hardwood lane
spinning backward
with slow-motion English,
ten pins leisurely fell
one at a time
leaving Power thunderstruck.

By game's end Power and Grace
were so busy looking, thinking
and smiling at each other
that they barely scored in triple digits.

Love at first strike
has led to courtship and wedding bells,
that will be heard
in the Old North State
come next spring.

What a game.

Summer Feast

REBECCA CROCKETT

The thick golden sunlight
oozes like syrup
'round the tree branches,
sticking to the leaves in a
sweet haze.

It runs in lazy rivulets down the bark,
pooling
in hollows
among the roots.
Warm, golden and
delicious,
it sticks to everything,
leaving squirrels fat and sleepy-eyed,
and blackbirds snoozing gently.

Too soon the day wanes,
nibbled
and licked away,
and everyone sleeps,
dreaming hungrily of one more golden afternoon.



RHIANNON LONE WOLF



LAUREN SNEED

A Temptress

DAVIS KAIN

A temptress, the trickster,
ever eager and ever willing
to a shadowed pine box lies
dejected turmoil seething soaked
firmly with baby blue blood
sparking fires that never burn.

A temptress, the trickster,
ever eager and ever willing
a blindfold did conjure into
essence of muffled drums; lily
white linen-draped consequences
of indifference.

A temptress? the trickster?
ever eager and ever willing?
An image seen, true, mirrors and
mirage throughout, uses of wizards
past in decadent betrayals. Trust all or
nothing, ashen gray ceases in all-consuming
midnight and brilliant white.

Daddy, I'm Cold

LEE BUDAHL

In all the years I known Judge Haggerty he was straight and honest as a plumb line, and the only day of work he missed was when his little daughter died in '35.

Judge Haggerty stood foursquare on the Law and he never give a inch on it. Except once.

I was bailiff as long as he was judge, so I known just how unusual it was in '38 when he stepped around the Law.

It was a hard winter; no work anywhere. One empty evening a few days before the Courthouse closed for Christmas, big Marsh Hooper, the sheriff, bangs through the courtroom door dragging a young feller about twenty or so in a ragged plaid jacket. They come up to the rail in front of the Judge, who had some books spread out on the bench, and Marsh commenced to tell that the young feller had stolen some clothes from Riverside Supply. Tommy-Joe Buchanan up in the balcony seen him and hollered and scared the young fellow so he jumped out the front door right into Marsh, who wrapped them tree trunk arms of his around him and put him in the squad car and carried him up to the Courthouse.

Whilst Marsh was talking the door opened a tad and two little girls, about four and six, crept in and sat down on the last bench. They was like two mice, in skimpy old brown cotton coats and toboggans pulled over their ears and just above them big round eyes.

Me and the Judge seen 'em, but Marsh and the young feller didn't, for their backs was to them. Marsh finished his story and went stomping out and didn't even look at 'em.

The door slammed shut and the young feller just stood there, looking at the floor. His hair was like ragged straw, and his face was pale,

with dark circles under his eyes. He looked down and out, all right, but he didn't look mean.

The Judge was like a mountain in a black suit. One eyebrow started to move down like it does when he's studying something.

The young feller raised his head and looked back at the judge, scared, sure enough, but at the same time straight on, man-to-man.

"Well?" the Judge rumbled, like thunder in the next cove. "Did you steal them clothes?"

The young feller spoke right up, kind of sad, but loud and clear. "Yessir. I was tryin' to."

"Why?"

The young feller dropped his eyes and shook his head. Then he looked up again. "I ain't got no excuse. I knowed it was wrong."

"Was it young-uns' clothes? You got young-uns? Them?" The judge looked toward the back of the room. The girls got even smaller then, and their eyes was bigger than their faces.

The young feller turned and when he seen 'em he kind of shrunk. Then he looked back at the Judge and started to talk; slow and shaky at first. "Yessir, them's my girls. Their Ma died a year ago and it ain't been easy for them. They ain't even hardly had time to be little girls, what with working around the house and all." The words came faster. "When I come home this evening—I still ain't found no work—the fire had gone out in the stove and they was sitting in front of it wrapped in a blanket. Becky—she's the little one—she looks at me and says, 'Daddy, I'm cold.'"

Now the words tumbled out. "I can't hardly even keep 'em fed, let alone dressed. Or warm." He swallowed. "I guess I kindly went crazy and I—I...." He'd used up all his words.

It got real quiet, and you could hear the wind moaning in the pine trees outside and the fire snapping and the stovepipe ticking.

Then it was that Judge Haggerty done something I never saw before or since. He give on the Law.

He says to the young feller, "You're guilty all right. But I don't guess you're going to do anything like that again. So I'm going to suspend your sentence." The young feller's eyes opened about as wide as the girls'.

But the Judge didn't stop there. "You know anything about carpentering?" he asked.

"Yessir." The answer come back in a croak.

"Good. I got an old house on Cary Fork what needs some work. I been thinking about hiring someone to do it. Reckon you'd be interested?"

The young feller's head bobbed up and down and his mouth said "Yessir," but no sound came out of it.

And the Judge kept on. "Mrs. Haggerty's got some young-uns' clothes that might fit them girls. They ain't new clothes, but they're warm. I'll bring some to the Courthouse tomorrow, and you can pick them up."

I guess I was staring, because the Judge looked at me and growled, "You got something to say, Billy?"

I shook my head, and I ain't ever said nothing about it—'till now.

The young feller was a pretty good carpenter. Little by little he got more work, and by the time the war come he was doing all right. After the war started they moved to Asheville, and we never heard any more about 'em.

That is, for about thirty years.

Then the whole thing come back on a day like the first one: a little before Christmas, cold and windy, the Courthouse almost empty.

The Judge and me was both some heavier and a little slower, and I was in my chair next to the courtroom stove, reading the paper. The Judge was in his office rummaging through his desk muttering about something he couldn't find.

Then the door down to the other end opened, and in come this lady in a long leather coat with a hood over her head so her face was in shadow. She stood by the door for better'n a minute, studying the courtroom.

Then, real slow, she walked down the aisle toward the rail, pushing her hood back. Her hair fluffed out in sort of a halo, all gold—and a little silver, too, now that I think about it. She had big brown eyes, a little sad, and she was beautiful, like a doe stepping out into a meadow of a morning: careful and graceful.

I recognized her for sure. I seen her on the TV and in a couple of movies and I got some of her records at the house. You'd know her too, but I promised her I wouldn't tell nobody her name.

She stopped at the rail and smiled and said in that soft country voice, "Good evening, Billy."

I like to fell off the chair when she said my name. I must have looked blank as a board while I was trying to get off the chair and stand up, because she laughed a little, like spring water over pebbles. I'd have give her my place in heaven, right then and there.

The Judge's chair squeaked and his boots clumped to the door of his office and he filled it, in that old black suit of his; then he walked to the rail.

"Judge Haggerty," she smiled.

"Ma'am," he replied, and give her a sort of little old-fashioned bow. His eyebrow was down, and that was about as close as I ever seen him come to staring at a woman. He'd seen her on the TV, too.

She said, "I hope you don't mind my coming into your courtroom unannounced. But I had to see it the way it was, and on a day like this."

The Judge nodded.

"I was here many years ago," she said. "Just before Christmas then, too. A young man who was out of work and dirt poor and at the end of his wits tried to steal some clothes for his daughters. He got caught and was brought directly here. You could have sent him to jail, but you didn't.

You helped him get back on his feet by giving him a job. He and his family lived here a few years, then moved to Asheville and eventually to Memphis."

The wind rattled the courthouse windows once, then it was quiet. "That young man was my daddy. My sister and I sat back there the day you didn't send him to jail.

"In Asheville our preacher's wife taught me about singing and after we had lived in Memphis a while I started singing professionally.

"I wrote the song 'Daddy, I'm Cold.'" The judge nodded slowly and she went on. "That song was about what happened here back then. The 'stern man in black, hiding his kindness with a frown' was you, Judge."

I knowed then that he remembered the young feller and the little girls from years ago, just like I did.

"Judge Haggerty, I want to thank you for what you did for my daddy. He never forgot." I swear she was touching the Judge's hand, even though she was ten foot away. "The words are 'Thank you,' but I want to add more." Her voice got gentle, like when she sings a sad song.

"Forgive me for being personal, Judge, but I know that you and Mrs. Haggerty lost your daughter back in the thirties, and that you didn't have any other children. I want to be sure your name won't ever be forgotten, so I'm going to build a wing on the hospital here and it's going to be called the Haggerty wing. Forever."

This was the only time I ever seen the Judge stopped cold. He opened his mouth, but he didn't say anything. She went right on, quiet and smooth. "I can do it, Judge. I'm pretty well off now. I wanted to tell you before my lawyers start talking with the hospital board."

Then she wasn't so serious. "But y'all have got to promise that you won't ever tell who's doing it. Promise?"

Well, sir, me and the Judge both mumbled our "Yes'ms" like a couple of school boys.

She smiled at us—sunshine through the clouds—then turned and slowly walked back up the aisle and out the door.

After she was gone me and the Judge didn't move or say nothing for quite a while. The only sound was when the wind picked up and the windows started muttering.

The judge blew his nose, and without talking we both got our coats and locked up and went home.

That was a few years back. And here we are now in the Haggerty wing. The Judge and Mrs. Haggerty lived to see it finished. And I've kept my promise, because I still ain't told who it was built it.

Since I come here I been looking at the old Courthouse, trying to see the face on the statue up on top—the one with the balance and scales. When I was working at the Courthouse I could see her in the morning when I got there and she'd remind me of the Haggertys' little daughter, so long gone. And then after the lady come in the courtroom, sometimes the statue would look like her.

I guess it don't matter which one it was—or is—since the scales are still level.



LUIS SANTOYO

The Long, Red Box

KAREN GILFILLAN

My father put his arm around my shoulder. I knew something was wrong. Mom gave the hugs in our family. She had been real sick.

He told me that she had gone to be with God. I stood still, not quite understanding what he was saying. I wondered why she didn't tell me she was leaving.

Nanny and Gramps arrived late that evening. There was a lot of quiet talking. I sat on the stair steps and listened. I knew what death meant. I'd seen dead before. A cat. An old dog. I remembered shooting a squirrel with my BB gun. I felt kind of bad when I looked into its non-seeing eyes.

The next day, Nanny laid out some dress-up clothes for me. She even made me take a bath. As I put them on, I remembered that these kinds of clothes were worn to church, weddings and funerals. Today my family and I were going to my mother's funeral.

I am eight years old. I'd rather be climbing trees or running through the woods with my dog, Midge.

Nanny held tight to my hand as we approached the long, red box. Someone said it was mahogany. It just looked dark red to me with shiny sort of gold stuff on the edges.

As any curious kid would, I looked into the box. I saw my mother laying there with a fancy pillow beneath her head. She looked like she was sleeping. There was a little smile on her face. I tried to talk to her, but she didn't answer. I didn't cry.

Uncle John led me away from the red box. I sat on the hard, smooth wood of the pew. That's a funny name for a bench.

People were all dressed up. I looked around. Some of the old women dabbed at their eyes with white hankies edged with crocheted lace. The kind my mother used to pull from her apron pocket to wipe my runny nose.

Hey, there's the preacher. I know him. He always wears this long black robe. I wonder what he's wearing underneath it. We listened to some words spoken loud, then softly. He asked us to bow our heads. I did. And kept my eyes tight closed. All I could see was my mom laying real quiet in the long, red box.

After a long time, the preacher said, "Amen." So did a bunch of other people. It sounded like the end, so I kept still. I did not cry.

My family and I got to leave the church first and were led to this big black car. We rode for a little while; then the car stopped way out on some country lane. We got out of the car and walked past all these stone things. They were sticking up from the ground. They had names and numbers on them. I tried to read them, but Nanny kept urging me on.

The red box was on some kind of pulley thing. I heard a voice and looked up to see who was talking. It was the man in the black robe. He did some stuff with his hands and then said, "Amen." So did I. I'm not sure why, but everybody else did. Some people were crying. Not me.

The red box was slowly lowered into this hole in the ground. My family and I were each given a white rose. We stood and walked together to the hole. Dad tossed in a rose. So did Nanny and other family members. I wanted to keep mine. Nanny smiled and said that would be all right.

We walked back to the big black car and climbed in. I turned in the seat to see a whole bunch of cars following us. It was kind of like leading a parade.

When we got home, I took off the go-to-church clothes and put on my stalking-the-woods clothes. I was tired of people hugging me. Saying things I didn't really understand and was pretty sure I didn't want to.

As I left the house, I put the rose in my jeans pocket and picked up my BB gun. My dog Midge and I hiked around the woods for a while. When I got really tired, I sat down on a moss-covered stump. I pulled the rose from my pocket. Some of the petals fell off. I knew when that long, red box was lowered into the ground, Mom wouldn't be coming back. She was gone.

A wet nose touched my cheek. I hugged Midge real hard. She didn't seem to mind.

And then, I cried.

Green

PAIGE HARPE

Green Indian cotton blows around my skin like a memory from when I was breezy.

The gold design scattered across the fabric was the laughter in my voice.

When I wore a dress like this, I was summer and the time of year was mine.

I was someone's trophy—which to some would seem empty,

but to me was silky like the season of summer.

I could wake up like the shining stars we fell asleep to in that city bed,

in the arms of a golden man, in a precious thrift store tee-shirt.

The sunshine took pity on me with my August birth,

surviving only through sunlight, and never shedding a tear until fall.

Only summer can break your heart and teach you enough life for the whole year—
with the purchase of one beautiful emerald dress. I am such a sucker for green.



JD

JACOB DEAVER

A Change of Luck

PAUL H. CROCKETT

Everyone believes in something. Stanley T. Stevenson believed in luck, with a devotion that bordered on religious. He had a horseshoe attached to the wall over his bedroom door, and he never left the house without his lucky rabbit's foot, his lucky four-leaf clover, and an assortment of keychain charms that spanned three keyrings. He refused to even go near a black cat, and he'd been anxious for weeks when he'd accidentally sideswiped a stop sign with his car and had broken his passenger side mirror. Any good or bad event in his life he attributed to luck, which he praised or cursed accordingly.

Stanley T. Stevenson believed in luck, but lately he just hadn't had any. His misfortune began with his yearly pilgrimage to Las Vegas. An avid gambler, Stanley frequently returned home wealthier than he'd left, but not this year. Three days before his vacation was supposed to end, he'd found himself flat broke and reduced to pawning his watch for gas money to get home. When he'd gone back to work and had a computer crash that lost six months' worth of data, he began to wonder if Lady Luck had it in for him personally.

All in all, Stanley thought as he stomped up the stairs to his apartment that evening, it had been a most unlucky week. He fumbled with his keys, giving an icy look to his apparently useless good-luck charms, opened his door, and stopped. Someone else was in his apartment. It was a tall woman with flaming red hair, dancing green eyes, and a fair, delicate complexion. She was wearing a flowing green gown that matched her eyes perfectly and was sitting on Stanley's couch. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He let out a low whistle. Maybe his luck was changing after all.

"Well, hello there," he said in his most charming voice. "What's a girl like you doing in a place like this?"

The mystery woman smiled impishly. "I came to see you, Stanley Stevenson," she said.

Better and better, thought Stanley. "Well, you've come to the right place for that. How is it you know my name, though? We can't have met before—I would've remembered."

The woman smiled again. "We have indeed met many times before, Stanley Stevenson, but this is the first time you have been able to see me."

Stanley frowned. Was she a stalker or something? He looked at the woman again and decided he could live with that. He'd play along for now. "Oh, yeah, now that you mention it, I think I do remember meeting you before. So, what was your name again?"

"You may call me Lady Luck," the woman said.

Stanley did a double take. "What?" he snickered. "Yeah, right! Look, if you want to get my attention, there are easier ways of doing it. Heck, just seeing you got my attention."

"I'm not kidding, you know," she said. "There really is such a person as Lady Luck, and I really am she. I know all about your luck, Stanley. I know how bad it's been for the past two weeks."

Stanley snorted. "Anyone could tell that."

"I know that if you'd bet on black instead of red at 3:52 p.m. last Wednesday in Vegas, you'd have won ten thousand dollars."

Stanley stopped laughing. Either this woman had been following him around for the past two weeks, or there was actually some truth to what she said. "Okay," he said. "I'll play your game. Let's say you are Lady Luck. What did you want to see me about?"

"Sit down," she said, beckoning to him.

"With pleasure," said Stanley, flopping down next to her.

"First," the woman said, "you need to know a thing or two about how luck works. Most mortals act as though luck is a changeable thing—they say 'I was lucky today,' or 'I have no luck.' This is not true. In fact, each mortal is given a set amount of luck each day. The amount may vary from person to person, but not from day to day. What does change is the allocation."

"The what?" asked Stanley.

"The allocation. In other words, if you become luckier in a certain area, there's a corresponding decrease in your luck elsewhere."

"Wait, wait," said Stanley. "So you're telling me that last week in Vegas I had the same amount of luck as I always do, but it just got spent on things other than winning at gambling?"

"That's right."

"Like what?"

"Do you remember the girl who sat next to you on the plane trip there?"

"Hoo, yeah! What a babe!"

"And how there was a taxi waiting for you right as you got out of the airport? And what an easy time you had finding a cheap hotel room? And how the noisy guy in the next room left the first day you were there?"

"So I went broke last week because my luck got used on that stuff instead?"

"Yes, more or less."

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard! Who's supposed to be in charge of this stuff, anyway?"

The woman's green eyes flashed dangerously. "I am, of course. I have to manage the luck for every person on earth, every single day, so you'll excuse me if I don't always apportion your own luck just exactly the way you like it." Her expression softened slightly. "The fact of the matter is, I'm getting a bit tired of your constant complaining about how unlucky you are. So, I came here to make you an offer I don't make to most mortals."

"What offer?" asked Stanley.

"I'm going to let you manage your own luck. Because you're so dissatisfied with the job I'm doing, perhaps you can do better."

"That would be very nice," said Stanley. "By the way, are you busy Friday night?"

"Never mind that," said Lady Luck. "What about my offer?"

"Oh, I'll take the offer. It sounds like it might be useful."

Lady Luck snapped her fingers. "Done. You are now the master of your own luck."

"I don't feel any different. Look, why don't we quit with this 'Lady Luck' thing and go have a drink or something?"

"If you doubt me, perhaps we can arrange a test. Try using some of your luck on something in particular."

"Okay, I want to use my luck on you having a drink with me."

Lady Luck's eyes narrowed. "You have to specify what portion of today's luck you want to use. And there's no use using it on me—it won't work."

Stanley sighed. "It was worth a try. All right, just to make you happy...." His eyes lighted on the phone on his counter. "I want to use, oh, 10 percent of my luck on a lucky phone call," he said, wiggling his fingers mysteriously.

Nothing happened.

"Well," said Stanley, "I guess—"

The phone rang. Not believing his ears, Stanley hurried to the counter and answered it. "Hello, this is Stanley. Is this who? No, this is Stanley Stevenson. You've got a wrong number, mister. Oh. You're who? Well, uh, it's been nice talking to you. Okay, bye." Stanley hung up the phone and looked at Lady Luck in disbelief. "That was the President," he said. "Apparently he was trying to call some senator and dialed my number by mistake."

"Now do you believe?" said Lady Luck smugly.

"Man, this is pretty weird."

"You can allocate your luck to anything you want, but I'd recommend keeping at least half of it reserved for dealing with life's little mishaps—otherwise things could get quite unpleasant." She stood up, gown swishing. "It's been lovely talking to you, Stanley Stevenson, but I really must be going now." Then she vanished, like a candle flame being blown out.

Stanley could hardly believe what had just happened to him, but he was already making plans. If he were to use his luck on getting money, he

might never have to work again. He wouldn't even have to go to Vegas to do it. Stanley looked at the state lottery ticket he'd had in his pocket and smiled. Today, the princely sum of fifty million dollars would be given away to one lucky individual, and Stanley intended to use his newfound power to ensure that person was him. If he could pull this off, he would be set for life. "I want to use all of the luck I've got left today on winning the lottery," he proclaimed dramatically.

He didn't feel any different, but neither had he when he'd gotten that phone call from the President. They were probably getting ready to announce the winners now, and Stanley didn't want to miss a second of it. He walked toward his living room, intending to catch the numbers on TV. As he passed his kitchen table, his foot caught on one of its legs and he went sprawling on the floor. He sat up, groaning. It felt like he'd twisted his ankle. He swore under his breath. Lady Luck had said something about reserving some luck for everyday mishaps, hadn't she? Well, what did she know? Winning the lottery was worth a thousand, no, a million twisted ankles. He fumbled his way over to the TV and turned it on. There was a loud popping sound, and all the lights went out. Cursing his luck, Stanley found a flashlight and checked his fuse box. It looked like he had at least one blown fuse. He rummaged around in the drawer where he kept his spare fuses but came up empty-handed. Of course. Stanley found the battery-operated radio he kept for emergencies and tried to turn it on. Naturally, the batteries were dead. He shook his head in disgust. Well, since he knew he was going to win, he could just drive down to a convenience store or something and turn in his ticket. He made his way out to the parking lot of the apartment complex he lived in, managing to pinch his hand in a door on his way out. When he got to his car, it wouldn't start. Well, he'd just have to walk, then. He got out of the car, and, after opening the car door again so that he could remove his pant leg from it, began walking in the direction of the local Handi-Mart where he'd bought his winning lottery ticket.

As he traversed a narrow stretch of sidewalk running alongside a busy street, he saw the store just ahead and quickened his pace. Lady

Luck's warnings had come to nothing after all. In just a few minutes, Stanley would be rich beyond his wildest dreams. He'd probably make headlines in the local paper. He thought he was probably the luckiest man on earth right now. Or as Lady Luck might put it, he had the best-allocated luck on earth right now. Stanley didn't see the bus coming at him until it was too late.

"So what happened here?" asked the reporter for the Star-Times.

"There's not too much to tell," said Sgt. Anderson of the Lynnville police force. "The bus driver says his steering and brakes failed all at once, and he ran off the road and plowed into this guy on the sidewalk."

"Mmm," said the reporter, jotting something down in his notebook. "Well, thanks for your time. Maybe we'll put this in local news if nothing interesting happens this week. Mind if I go talk to the bus driver now?"

"Go ahead," said Sgt. Anderson. As the reporter walked away, the policeman looked back at the scene of the accident. "Poor devil," he muttered. "He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Talk about unlucky."



CT MATTHEWS



JUAN RESTREPO

The Taste of a Ripe Peach at Midnight

JOYCE FOSTER

Shapes play and quiver outside
the kitchen window as I lick
the juice from my fingers.

The scent makes my mouth water
and floods me with memories—
steaming kettles, the laughter

of women in stained aprons,
admonitions—HOT, don't touch,
children, play outside,

jars and jars of jam placed
on racks to cool. I shiver
in the warm night breeze

engulfed in air, cool and musty,
as from a cellar with treasures
on dust laden shelves.



SHARDS A FONT

B C D

E F G H

I J K L M

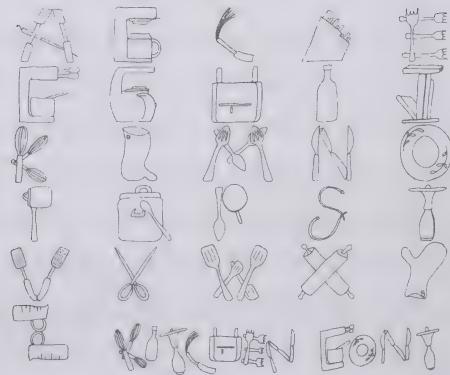
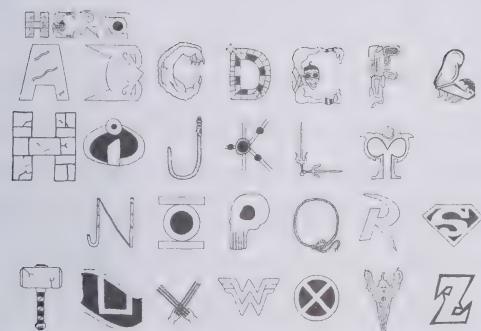
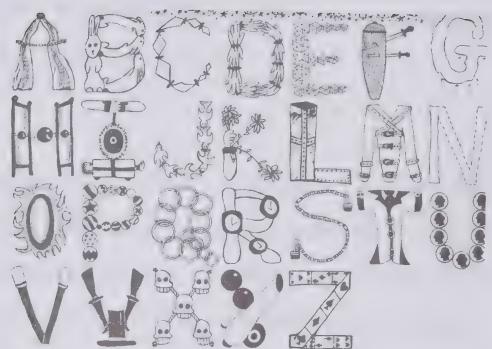
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THE SEA

**SCC STUDENTS
(TYPOGRAPHY)**



**SCC STUDENTS
(TYPOGRAPHY)**

The Wind in Your Face

MARGARET MARR

When I was a little girl, I wondered why Daddy kept an extra tire lying loose on the back of his truck. Of course, now, I know. The most comfortable place to sit, we kids would fight over that old tire, especially in the winter time when the car broke down and all Daddy had to drive was a beaten up, old pickup. We'd bundle up in coats, gloves, and hats; pile on the back; and huddle together just for the chance to get out of the house and head to town.

In the summer months and late into September, we preferred to stand up and let the wind blow through our hair. Barefoot, in a T-shirt and cutoff jeans, I felt the freest. I'd spread my arms, close my eyes, and pretend to fly.

Sometimes I'd sing and belt out the words, because no one could hear me over the roar of the truck engine and wind. I'd sing "Rocky Top," "Delta Dawn," "Rose Garden," "Take Me Home Country Roads," "Don't Mess Around with Jim"—songs my mommy listened to on the radio while she cleaned house or cooked supper. I never knew any other music existed.

Standing on the back of a speeding truck is considered risky and dangerous, especially when I'd lean over the bed yelling a message to Daddy through his open window—usually a destination one of us didn't want him to forget. I'm not sure if he ever heard me, but he'd nod, then motion for me to get back, and keep on driving. I'd again straighten into the wind. The only things I feared were getting whacked in the face by an oversized bug and combing out the tangles in my long hair after the truck came to a stop.

My daddy rarely ever drove fast, and then only during an emergency. Vehicles passed him in dangerous curves driving down two-lane roads.

If they were particularly irritated, they'd flip him the middle finger as they zoomed by. Even back then someone was always in a hurry to get somewhere. My daddy ignored them and kept on going at the same pace. He figured he'd reach his destination eventually, so he drove slowly and enjoyed the scenery along the way.

I'll never forget one of the few times he floored that old pickup. We had come up on an accident involving a motorcycle. A fancy, blue car had just blown by us in a blur. The next time we saw it, a frantic young woman stood alongside the road while a young man rolled around on the pavement next to his wrecked motorcycle, holding his mangled leg, in great pain.

As I stared at the young injured man, my stomach churned in fear and tears sprang to my eyes. It made my heart hurt to watch someone in such awful pain, knowing I couldn't do anything to make it go away.

Daddy stopped briefly, talked to the woman, told us to sit down, and then he put that old truck into gear and pushed it to its limit, racing to the nearest telephone—no such things as cell phones back then. We stopped at what used to be Parton's Gas Station, and Mommy gave the attendant the information so he could call an ambulance.

We headed home, and I never knew what became of the young man on the motorcycle, but I hope he survived and was able to ride again, because some things are worth the risk. Nothing quite equals the freedom of Carolina blue skies and the wind in your face as you ride a motorcycle, or in the back of your daddy's old pickup, going fifty miles per hour down a two-lane road.



JORDAN STEVENS

Somnolence

RHIANNON LONE WOLF

I can feel it in my muscles
the slow sweetness of sleep
My eyes fall shut lazy
flittering like autumn leaves
Fingers curl and neck unsteady
I let my conscience drift
Heavy shoulders must relax
though drowsiness draws them in
Sad that I must soon awaken
find the strength in my liquid limbs
But for now I shall rest
here let flesh repose
impressing marks upon my cheek



ANGELA GUNTER

'Neath Baptist Skies

GEORGE FRIZZELL

Come

walk with me
in the fields

through rows of corn
and runner beans
along the rolling hills

a plowed earth
that gives way
lives and breathes beneath us

earthworms writhe
with every step
buried down defenseless

beyond a fence
a line of trees
that leads to a hidden pasture

a cool breeze
on green spring grass
where a spider baits its capture

in burning light
we can sin
beneath the Baptist skies

and then pretend
in fields of green
a love that never dies

love story

EMILY ELDERS

*I hate and love,
and if you ask me why,
I have no answer, but I discern,
can feel, my senses rooted in eternal torture.*
-Catullus, "Poem 85"

She is tired of the subject of love, but she cannot see a way around it. Surely after a thousand thousand years, everything has been said that could be said. This should render her speechless, but she wants to write it down, love and what it does to a girl.

She has not learned, like all the other women, that eventually one just does not talk about it. She has not learned to settle quietly, like the stones beneath the river, being slowly worn away. She lives rejection fully, noisily and with much fuss, like a woman on a traincar holding up her skirts.

Can that be why it is so hard to write about women? Herself and her family in particular? Their love, her love, the love of women...it is at the core of everything. Human evolution, relationship, longing. Anger and fear. Pride and regret. *These are the boundaries by which humanity defines its existence, she wants to scream. How can I be quiet about that?* Maybe it is too simple then, she thinks, to describe us as we are. Maybe the only way we truly can be seen is through the tumult of our love.

Come to think of it, they always said you'd know it when you saw it.

And it's true—there's this frozen moment when you meet his eyes and no matter what you see there or what is happening around you, your heart gives this tiny involuntary helpless cry—"oh!"—and you flutter your hands uselessly, like an old woman, because you know that not even your own hands can stop this movement, this headlong rush into oblivion.

You know because, after weeks, months, without him around, he comes upon you suddenly, playing pool in a dirty country bar, and as you lean over the cue you suddenly remember: "he taught me this"; and as it floats in a whisper through your mind you are assaulted by his warmth, his smell. His hands guide yours firmly, smoothly, gripping the polished wood, and you close your eyes and breathe him in so safe, so happy, that

you keep your eyes closed and shoot blind. The combo goes in, the 9 ball inching around that 4 into the corner pocket, and when you open your eyes you are surprised by the smallness, the sheer uselessness, of the reality you are in, by your feet in cowboy boots, by the cigarette in your mouth.

You learn that there are days when the very air pushes against you, making it hard to move; you learn that there are days when the sunshine actually permeates your skin and that sometimes these days fall next to one another.

But always, you are mindful of the days passing. This is not the blur of days spent heartbroken, as we have all done before.

This is an act of will.

You know because he never fades. He is there in your sleep, when you stir half awake and it is dark and warm and you stumble over his name, your voice rough with disuse, and the sound hangs like a sacred syllable above your lips.

This forbidden speaking of his name is such a luxurious comfort that you slip back into sleep, even knowing that if you turn over there will only be a cold expanse of sheets as far as you can see and no oasis to be found anywhere.

You learn that no matter what you do you cannot be busy all the time. Before, you realize, there was pleasure in the return to self, a certain secret joy.

But now, when the house could not be any cleaner and your legs are freshly shaved and you've written all the bills out and finished all the art projects that have been gathering dust in the bottom of your closet—now, there is this space in time alone that scares you, pierces your soul, and though you are exhausted there is suddenly this energy in the darkness lighting you up, and you realize several hours later that you have forgotten to sleep and it is morning and someone (was it you?) has painted the kitchen walls red.

You know because no matter how much it hurts there is nothing left to know. He is still there, and you can't force yourself to want to make him disappear.

You still harbor hope, allow it safe passage through your heart, because every religious victim deserves an amnesty somewhere, and he is the first god you ever believed in, blindly, trustingly, though you denied it vehemently to him and to yourself until the day he left.

For the first time you cannot control your heart (which keeps saying, "Wanted this? No—not this—wanted—craved—real new kind of love—no—not this way—not like this.")—you cry, you are broken, paralyzed by his absence, and after this you are struck numb, until every

moment becomes a purgatory in which you float, unseeing, weightless and waiting, for his eyes to set you free.

I would have married him, she thinks, and knows it is a serious thought she has never before understood.

Her pain is so personal, so defining; she finds herself truly alone in it for the first time in her life. Shackled by the saving grace of her beautiful, wonderful, healthy daughter (who is asleep in the bedroom and who, while giving everything in life this patina of worth, sometimes only makes her grief sharper), she cannot escape the confines of her own mind, her own home. There is no leaving it behind.

Instead, she defines the word "routine." She walks fast, purpose a facade behind which she explores this sourceless pain, the way one picks at a scab or pushes at a toothache; she is awed by the concept. Legends of war and death, legions of dates and names and facts, all the subjects she has ever studied tell her: every enemy has a weakness, and every victor is also eventually a victim.

Which battle did I die in? she thinks. Which war is this?

There is a sort of disbelief involved here, random logical moments in which she sees lucidly, clearly: this is not good.

It begs defiance, yet all she can do is watch, nodding, agreeing with the murmurs of the spectators that yes, this is insanity, an illogical, yet mesmerizing, self-flagellation that could so easily be avoided through distraction or disengagement.

She understands their disquiet. Sometimes, in moments when she looks up from laughing with her daughter to see sunlight falling on the floor, when she sees her own words in print, when she forgets not to look in the mirror, she can see it too. There is a worthfulness there somewhere, a beauty that does not bend to his rejection.

Sometimes she even feels that her love is worth more than this.

But as time passes, the logic loses ground to the constant replay in her mind, which limits the making of new memories.

She drives faster, high on her utter and complete control over something so simple as an engine and four wheels. Her music is loud, primal and dark, so that when she is brave enough to sing she will be blissfully drowned out. The spaces that objects occupy are larger, too, she notices: the expanse of glass on a table set only for one; the distance from the grocery store to the car. The emptiness she moves through from the bed to the floor each morning lasts for miles.

She cannot decide: at what point does her love of a thing only become not enough love to make it real?



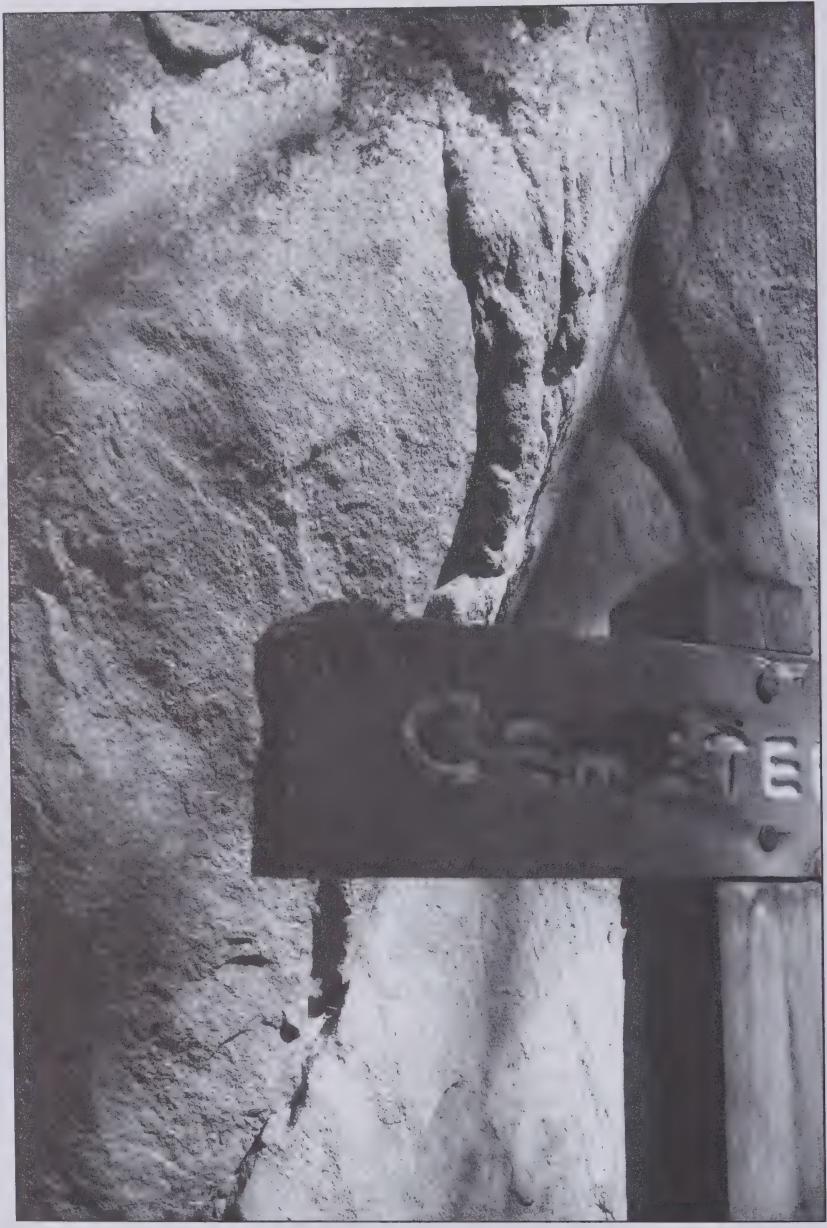
NANCY MINARD



DANIEL BROOKS



MATTHEW KIRKLAND



RHIANNON LONE WOLF

When It's Time to Go

BETTY HOLT

I should have known, Daddy,
When that little bedside clock of yours stopped ticking
That time was running out for you.
But I bought you a new clock, hoping to create more time.

I should have sensed, Daddy,
When you kept asking for your hat the day before
That somewhere deep inside you were preparing to go somewhere
And you wanted to have your loyal companion for the trip.

I did notice, Daddy,
That the tear-off calendar I gave you
Just stopped going forward on April 5, 2006, the same day
Time stopped for you, 97 years, 11 months and 20 days after it began.

It was only fitting that your hat should go with you,
The calendar should stop,
And that new clock should keep on ticking,
Reminding me of the minutes that I miss you,
The hours that I'm grateful I had you at all,
And the days I look forward to the time when I see you again.

The Loveseat II

TERESA T. JACOBS

The loveseat sat
in Grandmother's parlor
a dark, quiet place
except when the "Birds" were playing
or after supper
or when we rolled on hassocks
bump, bump, bump
into the sunroom.
Sun-yellow wing chairs
And fancy ladies' slippers
kept you company.
Mom and I just fit
my head in her lap.

The loveseat hovered
on the edge of the room
with only the china closet
for company.
Visitors perched
uneasy with your antiquity
sensing your stories
yet too young to listen
instead
yearning to be welcomed
into the present.
The cats claimed you
for their own.

They heard your music
and
you
endured.

The loveseat rests
by the window
as the china closet
stores memories
Grandmother's china
a faded rose
photographs
and flowers
dried beyond time.

And still
you offer comfort
dressed in lace
warmed by the woodstove
wearing the years
with dignity and grace.

Musing I sit...
and ponder
as birds chatter
and delight.



GARRETT ROPER

A Sestina for the Dying Season

REBECCA CROCKETT

Persephone, your mother calls you.
Demeter weeps, thinking you lost;
Her bitter voice whispers in the wind.
Begging, pleading, for your return,
She neglects her duty to the barren fields.
From your mistake, harvest's daughter, the green land dies.

The leaves fade. The world dies.
We begin to fear, Persephone, that we have followed you
Into the depths of Hades from those rich fields,
As light and life are slowly lost.
Harvest's daughter, when will you return?
When will warmth once more tease the wind?

Once we knew nothing but warmth in the wind,
And we did not understand the bloom that fades and dies.
We never thought, then, to long for your return,
For, innocent as you,
We never dreamt you would be lost.
Who can understand the bite of death in flourishing fields?

But now, now that ice traps the richness of those fields
And the breath of the soul is an empty wind,
We begin to understand, and mourn for life that can be lost.
We all begin to die—the world dies.
Demeter mourns for you,
And we despair of your return.

For touched by death, how shall anything return?
We may journey through hills and fields,
And still we will not find you,
Mocked only by skeletal trees and an angry wind.
Oh Persephone, everything dies,
And in dying, so much is lost.

But even now, some things cannot be lost.
We dream secret, yearning dreams of your return.
Though our hearts ache and our hope dies,
We still look for life among the fields.
We still search for secret whispers on the wind.
Demeter's daughter, we cannot help but hope for you.

You were lost among the once-green fields,
But surely you may yet return, your laugh soft on the wind.
If you return, what else that dies will spring again, with you?



DEANNA WAGNER



SHELBY BLANTON

The Inheritance

JOYCE FOSTER

Room 205 is just down the hall.

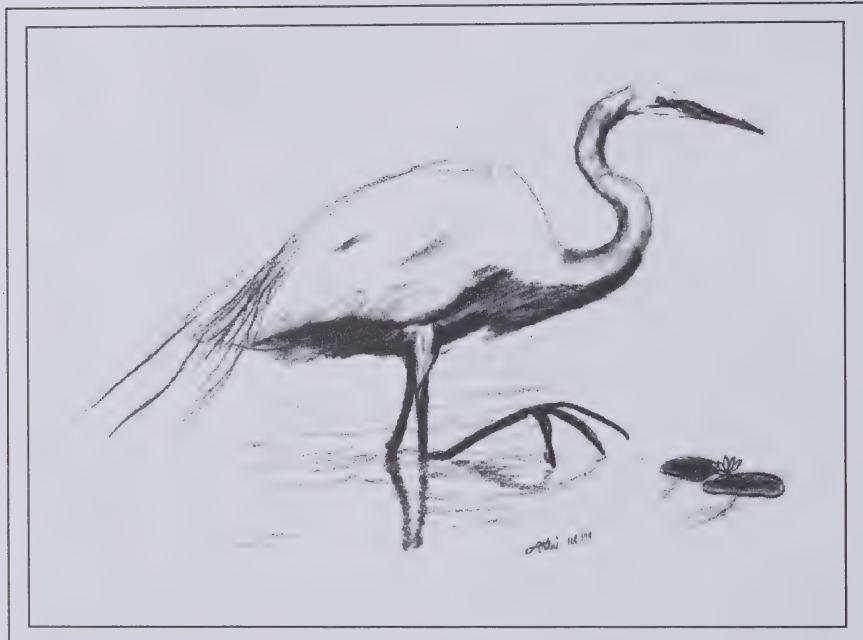
These walls, were they so narrow,
this pattered carpet as busy
on that day?

I saw nothing then other than
your face as it settled
like silk across
your bones.

Your hand in mine wilted
like the petals of a rose
on the stand
by your bed.

Now as I lie bound by tubes
that thread through my veins,
a red-eyed Cyclops guards
my heart's door.

I weave our spirits, yours and mine,
with threads of ancient clans into
a cloth of old design and ride astride
the winged Pegasus
to my daughter's distant bed and lay
my hand in hers as a son is severed
from her cord and I swaddle him with
that ancestral cloth.



AUTUMN WOODWARD

Reflections on approaching death indifferent

GEORGE FRIZZELL

you don't stay alive for yourself
but for others

now,

as they have slipped away
scatter-shot friends
and younger kin

efforts to revive
passion interest fear
collapse

So
ennui go

approaching death
indifferent

Nutshells

DIANA L. JURSS

One Might Say:

Buddhism's the religion of wisdom,
Islam, obedience.
Judaism, tradition/family,
Taoism, balance.
The Christians preach of faith and love,
The Hindus, life and cycles.
Pagans worship Earth and stars,
Atheists, their silence.
Even more, all things in between,
many others, undecided.

But I am not so worried
about believing something wrong.
I have aplenty shortcomings,
but "perfectionist" ain't one.
No, I'm thinking misbelieve
is not what God most hates,
rather more like apathy,
complacency, neglect.



CT MATTHEWS

Raven's Wing

KAREN GILFILLAN

It climbs around me
this darkness
of reality

Closes in as I take
a breath deep down
Feeling forsaken as

I thrash about
disturbing covers of
comfort

Exposing myself
to the night
Listening to the

sounds of silence
as I crawl into
my womb of self

Anticipating the sun's rise
casting a shadow
tomorrow

A glimmer of light to soften
my world filled
with black nights

beneath the Raven's wing



DEANNA WAGNER



MATTHEW KIRKLAND

On Stage

ANDREA RICH

Gritty rosin is caught under the tips of my toenails as I make my leap onto the stage. A wire snags my foot, and for an instant I think I will fall. Adrenaline rushes through my body as I take another smoother step toward the middle of the stage. My feet are bare and sweaty, and they slide across the hard floor with difficulty. Every eye in the building is upon me. I have three jumps to move to the other side of the stage, and each one stresses my exhausted legs. My arms float up over my head with ease. They twist around my waist with precision the way they have done countless times before.

My dress tickles my calves and dares me to laugh. The skirt is golden and yellow. It flies above my knees when I land my jump. It flows behind and around me with perfect grace. The upper part of the dress is tight and connects to the bottom, making a sort of leotard. It is darker than the skirt but still golden. There is an old smell to my costume that clashes with the sweet smell of sweat. The stage is hot, and each breath is a burden to take. My face is becoming wet from the sweat on my forehead. I feel the extra weight on my face from all the glitter and the stage make-up. I am hoping none of it will run down my soaking cheeks. I keep my face serene and pleasant for the audience all this time. For a moment, I am sure that mascara is trickling down my nose, but I reassure myself that that cannot happen. The second jump is a success as my waist turns and my left leg dashes behind the other. The power comes from my feet and moves up through my legs, then to my stomach, and this lifts me to the height of my ability. I have never been so full of emotion and so empty of thought at the same time. My love for life is overwhelming. I cannot tell where the choreography ends and where I begin. There is no space between the music and my movement; the two intertwine in the ultimate state of consciousness. My mind is free to wander, but I think of nothing. There is nothing to think of that could give me more excitement than this.

I can see deep crimson curtains ahead of me. Long heavy ropes trail up to the catwalk where they hold the curtains steady. Dark figures stand motionless off stage, whispering silent commands on their headsets to the people in the changing rooms down the hall or to the other faceless figures on the other side of the stage. My teacher is sitting in the audience. He is only one of the shadows. I cannot even pick him out of the crowd, but I feel his gaze upon me. He is going through every movement with me in his head and holding my strings like a puppeteer holds his puppet. All I need to do is smile and fall into place as the music plays. I feel his delight as I bring his choreography to life. Dance is his message to the world. I am only the messenger.

There are lights on four sides of me: to the left, right, front and above my head. Each light is roughly two feet around. There are two of these lights on the right of the stage and two more on the left, but many more shine into my eyes from the front. Hundreds of light blue and yellow circles dance on my eyelids when I blink. When I open my eyes, I see the lights themselves, and they burn my skin and make my eyes water. I wonder if the audience is still interested in my dancing, so I glance toward them, but all I can see is what looks like giant eggs sitting in rows of egg-crates. However unnerving this sight may seem, I am accustomed to it. All of these eggs are actually heads and their crates are shoulders. Stage lights make it impossible to see anything offstage correctly.

My time in the spotlight is over when another dancer follows behind me. She does the same steps I have just done. We dance in unison as I repeat my steps. Thoughts burst into my head, and I jump higher. She wants the spotlight just as much as I do, so she jumps higher as well. A third dancer joins us onstage, and we are all looking for the same thing. We all want to be the one the audience cannot take its eyes off of. We each play up our strengths. Mine is grace; I flow into every motion without effort or flaw. The second dancer's strength is muscle; she stabs the air with every leap. The third dancer's strength is height; each of her movements is long and stretched out, and her legs seem to be weightless. We are all doing the exact same steps. We each know our parts, and we dance together perfectly. I am oblivious to the outside world, and so are

they. The stage seems smaller now, and it is too crowded for the three of us to dance on with such enthusiasm. The choreographer insisted that we take up as much room as possible. He wanted us to move three feet with every step and at least five with every jump. I do it effortlessly because the stage is tiny compared to the classroom I have been practicing in all year. However, the stage is so much smaller than what I am accustomed to that it is exceedingly difficult not to run straight into the curtains or the other dancers. We finish our parts and run off stage. The other two stay in that wing and catch their breath, but I have to run to the wing on the other side of the stage. I am blinded by darkness. It is unnerving to run full speed through a black labyrinth of props, shoes, and unrecognizable faces. I arrive at my post and stand just out of sight of the audience. My friend who is not in this dance is sitting near me and laughs a word or two in my direction, but it is time to run back on stage and I have no time to respond.

I am blinded once again, but this time by light. My legs carry me to the front of the stage. I am now only feet away from my black and grey audience. My arm shoots straight into the air above my head and falls limply to my side. I follow it down to the floor. This part of the floor has not been trod upon, so it is cold on my back as I roll onto it, moving toward right stage. I am off the floor and gliding nearer to the others. There are ten of us by now, and we are leaping high into the air toward center stage. Our dresses are all different variations of yellow and orange. I find my place and stand motionless behind a few dancers and in front of a few others. We form a straight line on the stage. The dancer in front grabs at the air above her, and the rest of us follow. Our arms are no longer connected to our bodies, but they are stretching forth, away from our bodies in a fast, smooth motion. My arm reaches for the dusty rafters and for the lights hanging over my head. Then my hand falls to the floor and reaches for the center of the earth. These are my motions, and I repeat them eight or ten times before the lights dim. The room is silent for a quivering second, but then I hear it burst into a roar of applause. The noise is overwhelming. I turn to the left and quickly make my way through another labyrinth to get off stage, but this time it is made of sparkling sweaty bodies and bright swirling dresses.



JENNY
JAMES
©
2004

JENNY JAMES

Life

DAVIS KAIN

It's head on with a Peterbuilt
all eighteen wheels forthcoming,
gears shifting higher with every revolution
the jake brake disengaged, no mechanic in sight.
the satisfying crash of metal and meat,
the windshield unforgiving
as the airbag fails like last visions
as man becomes one with his creation.



NICOLE "ICKY" PEGG

Step on Yellow, Break Your Mother's Heart

JOYCE FOSTER

The skinny legged girl,
barely seventeen, stood
on the narrow platform
felt the timbers groan
as the train powered to a stop.
Whistles screamed obscenities
bells clanged discordantly
fire flashed blue flint from steel
on steel as though from a manhole
to hell and the dragon bellowed hisses.
The Redcap, his foot on the yellow step,
called "ALL ABOARD TO HATLANTA—
stopping in Mims, St. Augustine,
Jacksonville, Folkston, Valdosta,
Tifton and Macon. Come aboard,
Missy, this train is amovin on."
She turned to peer through
the pelting rain at their faces
pressed against the windshield.
So afraid to go, unable to stay.

Empty Masks

REBECCA CROCKETT

She's not as accomplished as you think.

Beneath that pretty face,

there is something old

and cra-

cked

and broken.

She will not look you in the eye.

If she did,

you might see through empty sockets

to a blank void.

She dwells in the twilit gardens

of her own mind.

Question her—she will talk,

but hear—she never really

speaks.

Watch her dance.

She moves ponderously, jerkily,

reluctant as a bear.

Her flailing feet are not her own.

Look,

you can see the sunlight

shining through the cracks in her bones.



MARY HEIM

Homer and The Hillbillies

MICHAEL REVERE

Old blind poet
sitting in ancient corner,
skull and bones rattle
spinning epigrams
far into the future.

Achilles Heel showed up
at Bradley's General Store in Dillsboro
seeking moonshine and fortune.

Bubba came off the front porch of the store,
picked Achilles up by the big toe,
and slung him back through memory
washing ashore at Homer's feet
with a note stuffed in his mouth.

Homer boned out the note and read
Your boy Deliverance
plucks a mean banjo
and we got him hired on
at the paper mill.

Achilles is lazy as a sleeping hog,
freezing in place
and pretending to be a statue
when asked to work.
You keep 'im.

Homer let his bones collapse
into a pile of helpless laughter,
then reached for his quill and ink.



AARON LAMBERT



LUIS SANTOYO

Home

DEBORAH BALLEW

While I walk in the waist-high grass, I look out over the gently rolling hills. The ground is dotted with an abundance of rocks that lay all around the perimeter of the field. My gaze follows the landscape up the field to the mountains that surround me like a fortress. I feel safe, like I'm being guarded by an old and dear friend. I hear the roar of the river as it passes me by in a quick flow. The water surges down past the old garden spot and over the waterfalls that at one time, before my existence, was the source of power for a corn mill. I thank God for his creative design and for allowing me stewardship of the small piece of land on which I currently stand. I have the privilege of owning 4.68 acres of farmland in the Tessentee Valley, previously owned by my grandfather, and his father before him.

I stare, mesmerized by the enormity of some of the rocks. I imagine they came to rest in this valley over thousands of years of erosion, perhaps like the landslide on Peek's Creek where tons upon tons of debris were released from on top of Fish Hawk Mountain and descended with a violent and torrential force, one of which I hope to never experience. The rocks lay very peacefully now though, with their once-jagged sides smoothed by the rains and flooding of the nearby river. The white and pale yellow-green lichen that inhabits space on many of them reminds me of the tiny patches of lace on babies' clothes.

I remember with a smile my older brother, Russell, and I as small children jump-walking these same rocks, trying to keep count and not hit the ground. Mama and Daddy would stroll along with Granny and Papaw, and Aunt Toots and Uncle Robert, dodging the rocks and cow-patties as they went. They would laugh at us and stop occasionally to pick blackberries that grow wild in the pasture. They would talk about how

"purty" the "taters" were this year in the garden, or how well, or not so well, the rest of the garden was coming along. I would constantly look around, in front, behind, in full paranoia, for the cows. I was TERRIFIED of them. They were enormous and I, at that time, was not. I had heard Daddy and Aunt Toots talk about being chased by cows when they were youngsters. I had visions of these behemoth Black Angus cows giving chase and me dying by the hoof. I imagined they would jump up and down on me until I was nothing more than a greasy spot.

I stop to listen to the crash of the water on the rocks below the falls. I can feel the mist of the water on my skin and wonder what it was like in my great grandfather's day when this was a working mill dam. I remember Daddy and Toots talking about how people would come at the end of the harvest in wagons, all lined up to have my great grandfather grind their corn for meal and grits.

There is nothing left of the building that housed the millstones; it fell into disrepair and eventually washed away with the floods. For years the millstones rested at the bottom of the falls until the people from the Outward Bound camp, at the end of the Tessentee Road, helped Papaw devise a pulley-type system. With logs and ropes, and using Papaw's Ford tractor, they hoisted those stones up out of the bottom of the falls. They currently stand as silent sentinels of a time long gone at the entrance to the driveway of my grandparents' old house.

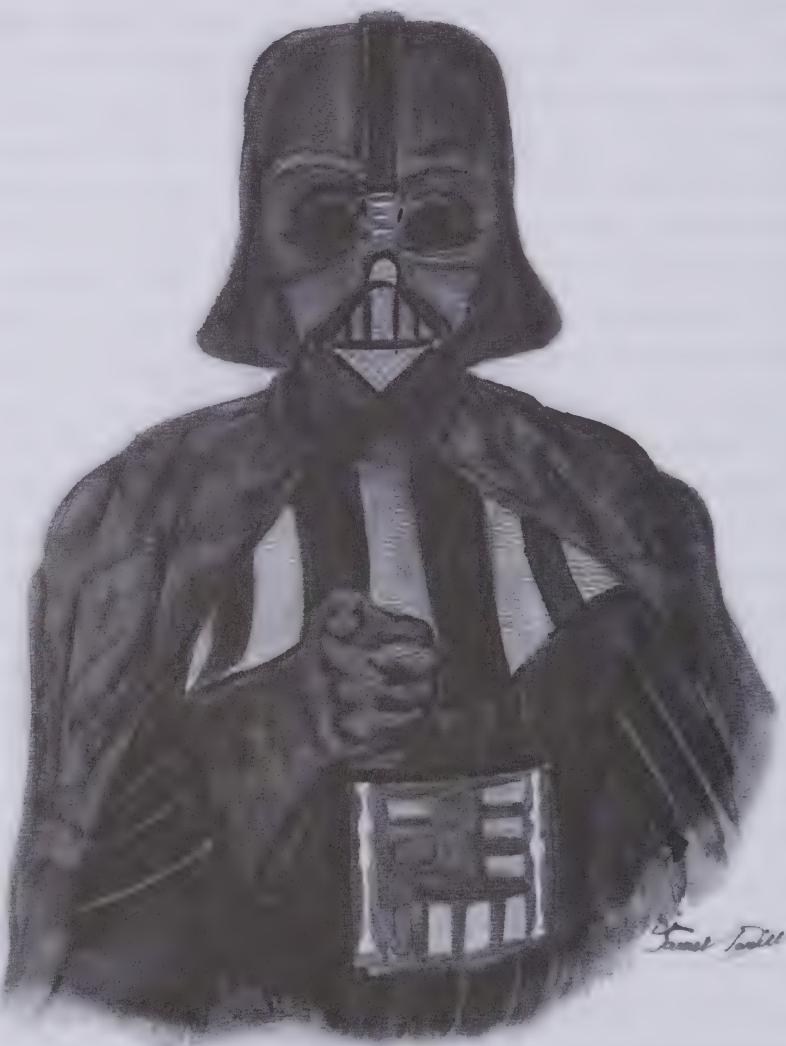
Remembering back to a very cold fall day in the field where I gaze when the corn that Papaw planted in the spring had gone to fodder. I remember my ears were stinging with cold, almost numb, and my nose had started to drip annoyingly. Daddy pulled Papaw's tractor and wagon into the bottom of the field and Russell, Daddy, and I started tossing the rock-hard ears of corn into the wagon. At the very same instant as a pesky drip of nasal excrement escaped and began to tickle, I threw an ear of the corn just short of the wagon. I watched in absolute horror as it slammed into the side of Daddy's unsuspecting head. It hit him in the

uncovered ear, and at that point I knew I was a piece of history. Daddy let out a bloodcurdling groan of pure agony. Russell looked at me and then back to Daddy. With eyebrows raised and a grimace of sympathy, he could tell that he was about to be an only child. He looked to Daddy, and then back to me again. I guess he was trying to decide if he should try and defend me somehow or "git while the gittin' was good." At that point when our gazes met, Russell and I erupted into gales of laughter. I don't know why. Daddy was not laughing. Nothing was funny at that instant to him. The only thing he could do was briskly rub his ear. Maybe it is a rule that at moments of great fear you temporarily lose your mind and the only response is to giggle hysterically. Luckily for me, in a little while Daddy found the humor too and managed a wee bit of laughter.

I remember all these things, as well as many others that I don't know, all happening here, where I stand. There are things that happened here that I wish I knew about and could tell a story for. It is a humbling experience to know that I get to be a part of something that has been here since the beginning of time. This land that encompasses my view is inherently who I am. It has given life to many generations of livestock, who gave life to my ancestors, who have in turn given life to me. Without this life-giving and sustaining soil, no living thing on earth can survive.

There are no potatoes or corn growing in the field, no cows in the pasture any more. Within the time of my ownership, I have repaired some of the fences and now rent out these fields, which were once farmland for vegetables and livestock, to people with horses. The horses are for pleasure now and no longer for work. I'm not sure yet how else the land will be shaped by my hand, but I am hopeful that I will be as gentle with it as my ancestors seem to have been.

My grandparents and Aunt Toots are no longer here in body, but this land tells a story if you are patient enough to listen and hear, of people and things that no amount of time will erase. Hopefully, there will always be evidence of a people living on, and loving this land.



DANIEL BROOKS



JENNY BROSTROM

Untitled

EMILY ELDERS

running all day long;
fleeing from glances on the street
...headlong into the furrows of my own soul.
all sewn up in this strangely fertile soil in my heart and
feeling this long strong waiting like a penance.
This day is my very own
cold and broken hallelujah:
It is hardest of all to believe
when there is no one asking you for faith.
what divinity can there be
in a god whose name you cannot speak aloud?
my religion is this drive, this multi-layered ambition;
its only child is this jumble of a routine,
a lumbering machine with
hinges that need oiling and tiny pieces
falling off to the tune
of broken glass on sidewalks
and mismatched words that spark in friction
pushing their burnt odor into my clothes.
as hard as I try
to be my own warmth
there is still something brittle and cold
about the sound of my laughter
and when I hear it I do not think of me
but of someone who can
love me
until I can breathe soft silence again.
my ability to live is a victory;
it is a miraculous melding of the adjectives
"tired" and "dry"
which somehow became
vivid and green.
all I do now is wait for
the right pair of eyes,
the ones with light that can see beneath
my motherhood and magnitude;
in shadows I stand, breathless, the essence of Victorian,
awaiting a suitor who might shudder
at a glimpse of my ankle.



JORDAN STEVENS

The Mascot

JOYCE FOSTER

I am a feather
On the wing
Of a raven
Blue black
Glinting
In the sun
Snarling air
With filoplumes
Power soaring
On hollow bones
Of ancestors.

I am a feather
Of a heaven
Borne creature
Lost in winds
Of a mighty
Upsurge
Floating aimless
Falling into
Calloused
Hands.

I am a feather
From a free
Winged breed
Caged in time
Imprisoned
In costumes
Of pale
Participants
In Thanksgiving
Skits.



WILL HUDDLESTON

Latter Day Death and Disappointment (Standing Outside of Heaven)

GEORGE FRIZZELL

It seemed,
 at one time,
 that I spent my life thinking;
 and,
 in the best of times,
 looking back,
 in unexpected sleepless nights
 at Armageddon
 and resurrection,
 I dreamed a world more vivid
 than the one I had come to know

But now
 and again,
 as I stand before you,
 and hear thoughts
 of desire and hope,
 I realize a shallow soul,
 an unetched life
 far from granite
 more like soapstone

A soft washed blue contour;
 a glance away in a conversation;
 a thought
 and wish
 it had been for me—
 knowing it wasn't

Somehow I can't help but feel a sensation
 of latter day death
 of disappointment,
 a lack of hope
 and dispensation—
 standing outside the gates of Heaven



MARIE LEE



LAUREN SNEED

The Ladies Aid Society

PAMELA HOFER

Nursing homes aren't designed to be hotbeds of intrigue, and Heavenly Reward was no exception. Indeed, why it bore such a frivolous moniker was cause for speculation, as it didn't harmonize with most people's idea of a joyous afterlife and the residents were in general agreement that the reward part was highly overrated. Nevertheless, like a geriatric garage for sputtering people, Heavenly Reward provided a respectable place to store the aged and the malfunctioning. Here, residents lived day to day, speculating how they came to be in such a place.

Mazie Hooter had determined that she was one of those people and had decided that the time had come to launch an offensive against the incumbent forces of benign neglect. Which is why six months after her impoundment for socially unacceptable behavior, she called the inaugural meeting of the Ladies Aid Society. She had decided that the club's primary mission would be to combat the embarrassment, intolerance and plain dumb indifference—in her opinion—that too many proponents of modern culture subscribed to for its older citizens. The mother of six children and twenty-three grandchildren and great-grandchildren, she had presumably outlived her viability and had been dispatched—too sweet—to be cared for by strangers.

"We'll just see about that," Miss Mazie said, both chins quivering in indignation.

Such mutinous thoughts would have been a source of astonishment to her family—had they known about it. As it was, it was a bafflement to her children why poor old Mazie stubbornly refused to conk out despite a medicine chest full of complaints, any one of which should've been enough to do her in.

Mazie was more than ninety years old with faded blue eyes that peered inquisitively through cat's eye lenses, thick as soda pop bottles.

She had the disquieting habit of blinking while swiveling her head, first to one side, then the other, looking for all the world like a great horned owl in her tufted and spiked iron hair. She was a vision complete in her high-top tennies and red-ribbed athletic socks, but her trademark was a cheap black pocketbook, which she had moored in the crook of her elbow during the latter days of the Nixon administration and which never left her side.

Speculation at Heavenly Reward entertained the pervasive notion that Miss Mazie couldn't have dropped that arm had she wanted to, after years frozen in more or less the same erect position, like a shriveled Lady Liberty leading the way for the wizened masses.

Now the uninitiated would think that along with her eyesight and diminished stature Miss Mazie had lost her capacity to reason. It was this underestimation that Mazie fully intended to exploit. She was not discouraged by the poor attendance at this first meeting of the Ladies Aid Society. Nor was she surprised to find Alice Louise there, for Alice Louise was always there—whether she was supposed to be or not.

Alice Louise—Al—suffered from Alzheimer's and was generally in the way, wondering from room to room, into the janitor's closet and back behind the nurses' station. It was the staff's never-ending duty to keep Alice Louise from underfoot and out of harm's way—which was no small chore.

Mazie was glad to see her, for a nuisance she might be, but she was as strong as a rhino and fearless. It was Alice Louise's unshakable belief that other humans were obstacles to her progress, and she cheerfully went around tackling them whenever the unwary ventured into her trajectory. Piles of sprawling visitors were a common sight at Heavenly Reward, and it was a rare day when the administrator didn't receive at least one complaint about Al's kamikaze tactics. But, in spite of her notoriety, few really knew what Al looked like because she insisted on wearing a plastic mop pail over her head—Al's version of a football helmet.

"Out of my way," Al said, her head lowered like a charging goat. "I'm coming through."

Oddly enough, the bucket wasn't the only thing people noticed but also Al's penchant for wearing nighties with peek-a-boo necklines. As she was rather

well blessed in the bumper department, it was generally considered that various body parts were at times in serious peril. More than one nurse's assistant was reduced to faltering uncertainty with the need to extract their patient from yet another tangle of unfortunates bowled over like ninepins, hopefully without further exposing strategic parts of Alice Louise's anatomy.

The list of attendees that day was rounded out by Enos Birdsong, too surprised for once to skitter away. Enos was a new inhabitant of Heavenly Reward, recently impounded much to the relief of her exasperated nephew. As ubiquitous as Al's presence was, Enos Birdsong's was not, as she chose to scoot from pillar to post in a somewhat apologetic attempt to keep a low profile. Enos staunchly refused to raise her eyes above floor level, so it was no surprise that she and Al were frequently entangled despite her diminutive size and efforts to avoid social engagement. A ski toboggan with a flattened pompom pulled low over her forehead finished her smashing ensemble, which was fortunate as it shielded Enos from the far more projected advance of Alice Louise.

Anyone observing the rather odd gathering that day might have wondered what it was all about. However, as usual, no one paid any attention to them. An unlikely general, Miss Mazie nevertheless issued her orders, an action that brought rasping snorts from beneath Al's mop bucket and whimpers from Enos—much like a field mouse considering the prospect of confronting the local barn cat.

Despite Mazie's machinations, life at Heavenly Reward continued pretty much as usual. As time went by, however, it gradually became obvious that something was going on. As usual, Al was up to her bucket in trouble, and like a timid shadow, Enos was there at her side. But always Mazie Hooter was at hand, her pocketbook poised.

Before long, reports began to filter through of missing change or small bills. No one was exempt from the petty thievery, although the well-heeled visitors did seem to bear the brunt of the losses. Eventually the local constabulary was called in to interrogate the staff one by one. All of which Miss Mazie watched with a studiously assumed look of incomprehension behind the cat's eye glasses.

Fully aware of what was going on, the other residents maintained a collusion of bemused silence. When frequent outings and almost weekly birthday

celebrations became the norm rather than the exception—and all financed by the Ladies Aid Society—mobile residents of Heavenly Reward eagerly vied for participation in the regular fleecing of visitors.

"It's my turn," said one grizzled inmate.

"Dadburn you, is not, it's mine," said yet another. And so it went.

The long-term effect on the staff was remarkable. Distrust and suspicion were rampant, resulting in the multilateral alienation of former friends and coworkers. Simply put, no one trusted anyone. In dire need of commiseration, the workers turned to the one remaining source of community—the residents of Heavenly Reward.

Before long, family visitors couldn't help but notice this shift in prevailing attitude, and a corresponding increase in the frequency and interaction of their visits occurred as well.

Members in good standing of the Ladies Aid Society noted the positive changes with varying degrees of relish. Miss Mazie's pivoting visage was now accompanied by a peculiar and almost continual dry chuckle. Al gleefully adopted a brand new mop bucket while Enos had taken to sporting a Yankees ball cap in neon pink.

Eleven months later, Miss Mazie's funeral was widely attended, notable for its steady stream of wheelchairs and ambulatory friends. The loving family received a final jolt at the reading of the will when Miss Mazie, being of sound mind, left everything she owned—lock, stock and pocketbook—to the benevolent order of the Ladies Aid Society.

New society president Enos Birdsong promptly moved that the club set aside funds for Mazie Hooter's tombstone. It was no surprise to anybody that when it arrived, the black marble marker looked a whole lot like Miss Mazie's pocketbook. By all accounts, it was a fitting memorial for a final partaker—mover and shaker—of Heavenly Reward.



MARIE LEE



GARRETT ROPER



NANCY MINARD

responsible editor: a few good—(including Eric Sander) standard
medium (amp — re-bound after Quill book — from which one author
wrote his/her own introduction)

Editorial office: 1000-285-2200 ext 2200 or 2201; email: msl@mslcc.net

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Each submission should include the author's name, address, and phone number on every page.

Essays, local history, poetry, and short stories—as well as black-and-white artwork—may be submitted. All submissions should be typed or printed, and prose is limited to 2,000 words.

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